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'You Could Shame the Great Arthur Himself': A Queer Reading of Lancelot from BBC's *Merlin* with Respect to the Character in Malory, White, and Bradley

JOSEPH BRENNAN

A queer reading of the Lancelot character as he appears in BBC television series *Merlin* (2008–12) and the works of Malory, White, and Bradley, situates the cult series in the long heritage of Arthurian adaptation and reveals a secretive and troubled figure with a personal connection to his adaptors. (JB)

T.S. Eliot defines culture as a 'whole society'—that is, not determined by any individual or group of individuals from a particular class or social standing. Culture includes, he writes, 'all the characteristic activities and interests of a people.'[1] Raymond Williams, whose work laid the theoretical foundations for cultural studies, employs Eliot's definition a decade later to critique the proud tradition of polarization he believes exists between populist and cultural literature, or the canon.[2] The high/low binary bound up in the canonical/popular text divide evokes notions of the literary work, and the responsibility that the critic must bear in identifying, preserving, and studying artifacts that will stand the test of time. Antony Easthope believes the key to dismantling binary thinking in literary studies is to study 'popular culture alongside canonical texts in the form of an enlarged cultural studies.'[3] Due to its dual status as popular text and adaptation of Arthurian literature (a literary corpus that continues to sustain critical study, as evidenced by this journal), the BBC's *Merlin*—a BBC One television series[4] with a large cult following,[5] which finished its five-year run in 2012—is an ideal text for such an 'enlarged' approach.[6] This article situates *Merlin* in the long heritage of Arthurian adaptation, attending specifically to the Lancelot character and the centrality of queer readings to the Arthurian legend.

In the first episode in which the character appears, Merlin tells Lancelot, 'You could shame the great Arthur himself.' This foreshadows much of what will befall the character in the series, including his considerable skill with a sword and his eventual affair with Guinevere. But it also gestures to much-debated desires Lancelot may harbor for Arthur, a double entendre that makes

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the line a suitable title for this article. I compare *Merlin*'s Lancelot with select Arthurian literature—Malory, White, and Bradley—in which the character is represented as a secretive and troubled figure with a close and personal connection with its adaptors, Malory and White in particular. I examine Lancelot's sexuality in *Merlin* in relation to a literature that is itself rich in speculation—and has been a source for speculation by many scholars before me.[7] In this respect, close reading of this popular text within the context of the literary tradition to which it hearkens offers fresh insight into this enigmatic character's appearances previously and today.

TAKING A QUEER APPROACH TO THE REPRESENTATION OF LANCELOT IN *MERLIN* AND OTHER ARTHURIAN TEXTS

Merlin's fifth and final season culminated in December 2012 with the inevitable[8] death of King Arthur in the arms of his manservant, Merlin—who in this take on the legend was his contemporary. Arthur's death brought to an end a homoerotic relationship that was visible from the program's pilot episode and has resulted in a devoted slash[9] following among fans of the series. *Merlin*'s cult television status is due in part to the fan practices it has inspired, namely its popularity among slash fans. In this context, 'slash' refers to a practice whereby fans homoeroticize the bonds between male media characters and personalities, creating texts (including fiction, video, and art)[10] for distribution within communities of likeminded fans. Slash readings and their resultant fan texts are in keeping with a tradition of using queer theory to analyze Arthurian texts. Certain medievalists have proposed a 'queer approach'[11] to texts of—or set in—the Middle Ages in an attempt to make intelligible expressions of same-sex desire.[12] Glenn Burger, for example, champions the use of queer theory in the analysis of medieval literature, as it provides a means 'to map a more dynamic, less assured account of the body in motion within the prevailing discourses of power.'[13] Richard E. Zeikowitz explains the significance of proposing that chivalric texts go beyond homosociality. He says that while modern society will often define 'queer' *against* heteronormativity, in the medieval context (a context in which male bonds are overtly and unashamedly homosocial) queer comes to oppose 'homosocial normativity—that is, societies characterized by socially acceptable male-male bonding and intimacy that may at times be erotically inflected.'[14] Similarly, Karma Lochrie argues that viewing queering as a 'project of contestation' is useful in disrupting 'our assumptions about medieval culture and textual practices.'[15] Glenn Burger and Steven F. Kruger also believe a queer study of the Middle Ages is a productive pursuit, and one that 'promises the recovering of cultural meanings that are lost, obscured, or distorted in work that either ignores questions of sexuality or attends only to hegemonic or heteronormative understandings of it.'[16]

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In her 2012 study of seventy-two Arthurian-inspired novels published between 1963 and 2010, Roberta Davidson notes that many modern retellings of Arthurian literature have made explicit reference to homosexuality—albeit, for the most part negatively.[17] M.K. Hume's *King Arthur* series, for example, 'takes the demonization of a homosexual male character further than most, constructing him as an emblematically decadent Roman and aligning him with pedophilia, rape, bondage, and child murder.'[18] While in Joan Wolf's *The Road to Avalon*, 'a jealous and destructive homosexual knight is Guenevere's rival for the Lancelot figure's affection.'[19] As Davidson observes, the offending knight 'betrays, by his transgressive desire, the homosocial and heterosexual bonds of the other men.'[20] Davidson also chronicles more positive representations. Rosemary Sutcliff's *The Sword at Sunset*, for example, 'creates a pair of male lovers who are positively—even heroically—represented,'[21] much like in the tradition of Mary Renault's Athenian male protagonists.[22] Davidson does note, however, that as a devoted pair, 'they represent no threat to the heterosexual male characters.'[23] This present article draws on the traditions of queer theory[24] and the 'queer approach' to medieval texts outlined above in order to situate *Merlin*'s Lancelot with respect to select Arthurian adaptations.

Merlin's Lancelot appears in one episode per season until season four (S01E05 [Season 1, Episode 5], S02E04, and S03E13), where he appears in three episodes (S04E01, E02, and E09). Of all of Arthur's knights, he receives the most character development. Lancelot *performs* knight-like qualities well. He is introduced in the series, for example, via a heroic act—rescuing Merlin from a griffin—in S01E05. And when Arthur establishes the Knights of the Round Table in S03E13, Lancelot is the first to pledge alligance:

> You taught me the values of being a knight: the code by which a man should live his life. To fight with honor, for justice, freedom and all that's good. I believe in the world that you will build.[25]

Lancelot does not only possess chivalric qualities, he personifies them; he *is* all that is right with the world (*Guinevere*, S02E04). He is the medieval carryover in a contemporary retelling,[26] the only character to truly embody and subscribe to the fantasy of the chivalric romance. And as the queer reading in this article will demonstrate, his own happiness, and later his life, is the cost. As I will show, he is noble and tragic in legend as well, where his devotion to Arthur and his own feelings of inadequacy and difficulty forming relationships with women has led many scholars to speculate on his sexuality.[27]

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THE LEGEND BEHIND THE MAN: SYMBOLISM OF *MERLIN*'S WHITE KNIGHT

Merlin co-creators Johnny Capps and Julian Murphy cite Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*[28] as a principal influence on the narrative structure of *Merlin*. Alfred Lord Tennyson's 1856 *Idylls of the King*,[29] T.H. White's 1958 *The Once and Future King*,[30] and Marion Zimmer Bradley's 1982 *The Mists of Avalon*[31] are the best-known subsequent retellings of Malory,[32] and are worth considering in relation to the Lancelot character. These authors also adapt Malory and there is no doubt that they too have had an influence over the *Merlin* retelling. Evidence of this can be seen through *Merlin*'s adoption of one of Tennyson's most pronounced deviations from Malory, which is in regards to Guinevere's fate after her adultery is discovered. Tennyson sees her flee Camelot—rather than being sentenced to death and subsequently rescued by Lancelot—and receive Arthur's forgiveness; these two amendments Tennyson makes of Malory align more closely with the course of events surrounding Guinevere's betrayal in *Merlin*. In addition, White's 'once and future king' motif is employed as a central narrative device in *Merlin* and is the justification of its twist ending: the titular character is convinced of Arthur's great destiny as the 'once and future king' early in the series and is shown in the last scene of the program travelling through modern day Britain, waiting for Arthur's return. In another point of comparison, White also has Arthur begin the narrative as a flawed youth who develops and matures over the course of the story.[33] The gap in Malory's account of Arthur between birth and succession to the throne is filled in in White's first book, *The Sword in the Stone*.[34] Filling in Arthur's backstory was a core intention in *Merlin* also. Then there is Bradley, the best-known recent retelling, which has been differentiated from earlier renditions of Arthurian legend by scholars for its focus on women, who are typically marginalized in earlier accounts (most notably in White).[35] This is something with which *Merlin* seems equally concerned, a fact made apparent via its focus on the bonds of Morgana (known to legend as Morgan le Fay[36]) and Morgause—and the lesbian undercurrents of this relationship, to be examined later in this article[37]—as well as the added critique of whiteness through the casting of a black Guinevere.

In Malory, as in *Merlin*, Lancelot is the most noble of Arthur's knights, one who adheres with the strictest devotion to the Pentecostal Oath.[38] And yet, as becomes clear in Caxton VI, the world Lancelot inhabits is much too flawed for such pure devotion. The same can be said about the character in the television series. In S01E05, for example, after being disgraced and stripped of his knighthood, Lancelot exhibits unwavering resolve to serve Arthur: 'It's my duty, knight or not.' Arthur often speaks of duty throughout the series—the duty imparted to him as the sole heir of the throne. Lancelot's duty is one of his own choosing, in line with his own moral code. This is what makes

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him the noblest of all and, as Guinevere remarks, the likes of which she has never met before (S01E05).

Merlin is richly symbolic in its representation of Lancelot's purity. To take one example, the colors of horses in the series appear to comment on the nature of the riders, Lancelot most of all. Jorge Abril-Sánchez argues that the origins of chivalry can be traced to the ancestral use of the horse as a military weapon by the aristocratic class of primitive peoples, such as the ancient Romans, who were given the name *equites*.[39] The significance of horses to knights is apparent in the Lady of the Lake's sermon on knighthood to Lancelot in the *Prose Lancelot*, which was an influential text for Malory's rendering of the Lancelot character.[40] In setting out for Lancelot the traits necessary for knighthood, the Lady of the Lake explains the symbolism of each knightly component—his armor, his hauberk, his helmet, his horse—with respect to his duty to the Church.[41] The horse is described as signifying the common people.[42]

Binary symbolism of the colors of horses has a long tradition in literature. It plays a signification role in works from Apuleius[43] to chivalric romance *Sir Gowther*[44] to James Joyce[45] to Disney.[46] The inclusion of white and black horses signifies all that is bound up in the whiteness/blackness divide, such as purity/impurity, good/evil, and light/dark. In S04E13, for example, a dying Merlin is draped over a black horse, as symbolic of death, and escorted back to Camelot by Lancelot, who rides a white horse, symbolic of life. In *Merlin*, Lancelot, Lady Morgana (who after her betrayal of Uther in S04 rides a black horse), Princess Mithian, and Queen Guinevere all ride white horses. These are all characters that have shown themselves to be pure of heart. King Uther, and later King Arthur, are shown riding the same tan horse. The tan horse is distinct from the horses the knights ride, which are darker. With a patch of white on its forehead, Merlin's horse is also distinct. The appearance of white on an otherwise dark horse could signify an inner, hidden greatness. Merlin has a destiny as great as Arthur's, but it is one that cannot be spoken of. Although glimpses of this great destiny are able to be seen at various times by Arthur,[47] the collective meaning of these displays of bravery and wisdom are only fully realized in the final episode of the series when, as he dies, Arthur says: 'Merlin, everything you've done, I know now. For me, for Camelot, for the kingdom you helped me build.' (*Arthur*, S05E13) Lancelot's white horse is the horse Arthur chooses for him in S01E05—'There's a horse waiting outside.' That Lancelot retains the white horse even after joining the Knights of the Round Table several years later symbolizes the singularity of his noble nature (as the *most* noble, the *most* brave), even among Arthur's circle of men: he is unlike any other. The choice of riders depicted riding white horses in the series supports traditional symbolism of the white horse as the carrier of the pure and the heroic.

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It is worth noting, however, that in this context white creatures may symbolize femininity as well. In S04E08, for example, a dirt-smeared commoner—Mary Howden, from an outlying village—also rides a white horse, a gesture more intelligible as a comment on her gender than her pure nature. As I will argue in the latter portion of this article, the implication of Lancelot being the only male to ride a white horse is that this is telling of his displacement from Arthur's homosocial circle—as much, that is, as it is a comment on his unique nobility. Feminine connotations of white,[48] as representative of purity and virginity for instance, also account for Morgana's transferance to a black horse and attire, which reflects the shift in her character from feminine to masculine, from passive to active, augmented by her relationship with Morgause.[49] Consideration of equus coloring in *Merlin* demonstrates a concerted effort to mark Lancelot's displacement. As will be shown, this displacement is comparable to the literature on which the show is based and that many scholars have aligned with the knight's sexuality.

LANCELOT AND THE CHIVALRIC TRADITION

Chivalry[50] emerged in Western Europe during the ninth century as part of the social contract that bound medieval knights to military service for their feudal lords.[51] To the medieval knight, chivalry meant 'a wholehearted loyalty to his lord, an oath to protect the defenceless and, above all, his defense of justice and faith.'[52] By the twelfth century, the chivalric tradition had been well-established in Western Europe. It was believed that the virtues necessary to become a knight were only possible through the ancestral line.[53] As such, only those who could certify descent from a noble family were to be accepted as members of the knightly order.[54] The chivalrous ideal was a combination of a courteous manner and heroic competence with a sword.[55]

By the late Middle Ages chivalry had lost touch with its principles and become entirely concerned with external appearances, continuing on only in romance.[56] During the Renaissance, aristocracy adopted the moral values of knighthood—passed down through the bloodline—and incorporated them into the training of nobility.[57] The publication of Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quijote de la Mancha* in 1605 symbolized the collapse of the Age of Chivalry. The novel critiques chivalric texts—which were going out of fashion at the time—through the title character, who becomes unhinged when he attempts to emulate heroes from chivalric literature, such as Lancelot and King Arthur. Cervantes exposes the fallacy of the chivalric myth, demonstrating that, as Maurice Keen writes:

> [O]utside literature, chivalry really was no more than a polite veneer, a thing of forms and words and ceremonies which provided a means whereby the well-born could relieve the bloodiness of life by decking their activities with a tinsel gloss borrowed from romance.[58]

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Keen's distinction between literature on the romanticism of the codes that the intrepid medieval knights lived by and the grim reality of their lived activities is a useful introduction to the romanticized character of Lancelot and how he is written into *Merlin*. If *Merlin* is a modernized version of Arthurian legend, the program's Lancelot is its one truly medieval carryover. His high romance devotion to chivalric behavior and the institution of knighthood as it is described in chivalric romance makes him unlike any other, even Arthur. 'Ever since I was a child I've dreamed of coming here,' he tells Merlin in S01E05. 'It's my life's ambition to join the Knights of Camelot.' While Gwaine and Percival come to join Camelot's knighthood as a result of circumstance in S03E13, Lancelot pursues knighthood and its chivalric notions with a religious devotion. He is a romantic and tragic figure in the series; the first of Arthur's future knights to appear, and also the first to die, only to be resurrected by Morgana in a final cruel twist of fate that sees his good name tarnished and his betrayal of Arthur, the one he loves most. It would seem that shame is the price he must pay for placing stock in the fantasy of romance.

Lancelot's old-fashioned, homosocial nature means he never truly belongs among the modernized Knights of the Round Table, evidenced by the symbolic indications in *Merlin*—such as the color of horses—that mark Lancelot's uniqueness. For much of the series the character engages in a tortured pursuit of nobility that he is never able to obtain; while he has affection for Guinevere (who is essential to his construction as the most romantic of Arthurian knights), it is his love toward Merlin and Arthur, and unashamedly homosocial interaction with them both, that renders him queer in the modern context of the series and alludes to a history of homosexual implication in the legend. To elucidate this history, I compare *Merlin*'s Lancelot with select Arthurian literature, namely Malory, White, and Bradley.

COMPARING *MERLIN'S* LANCELOT WITH MALORY'S AND WHITE'S

John Steinbeck's Malory-based *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights* was published posthumously in 1976. In a letter written to his editor while completing research for the book, Steinbeck proffers that if 'it is nearly always true that a novelist unconsciously idenitifies himself with one chief or central character in his novel,' a character into which 'he puts not only what he thinks he is, but what he hopes to be,' then 'Malory's self-character would be Launcelot':

> All the perfections he knew went into this character. All the things of which he thought himself capable. But, being an honest man, he found faults in himself, faults of vanity, faults of violence, faults even of disloyalty, and these would naturally find their way into his dream character.[59]

Steinbeck reconciles the impossible perfection of the ideal, of the man all men strive to be, combined with the inevitable flaws of human nature.

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Understanding Lancelot as Malory's dream character explains why he resonates with so many, even in subsequent writings of the legend. It also explains the tragedy of this character, living by a code he is fated never to fulfill. Lancelot *performs* a masculinity only found in the most fantastic of chivalric romances.

Donald L. Hoffman examines the performative nature of masculinity in Malory. While he acknowledges *Le Morte Darthur*'s 'sufficiently traditional' assumption that man is the model human, that the noun '*vir* is the root of *virtue*,'[60] he also argues that the work presents 'an array of "masculinities" as diverse practices.'[61] Malory 'does not seem concerned with what a man *is*, but with what a man *does*.'[62] A character of particular fascination for Hoffman is Lancelot. In Malory 'Lancelot tries on and rejects the various modes of masculinity until accepting his final role which includes the Christlike and the feminine.'[63] Lancelot seems out of place in *Merlin*. Perhaps this is because of the masculinity he performs, which seems to be what he sees as the ideal, virtuous male; an ideal that is unattainable in his life and in his mind, and eventually only possible by martyrdom at the Isle of the Blessed (see S04E02).

Certain adaptations of Arthurian legend subsequent to Malory, such as those examined herein, seem to agree with this assessment of Lancelot's masculine performativity, many singling him out and some interpreting the character as also bearing the burden of secret sexuality. Claims of desire among the 'brothers-in-arms' who occupy Arthurian legend may seem contentious given the pure, homosocial love of the men, such as Malory's Gareth who loved no knight as well as he did Lancelot.[64] However, as *Merlin*'s Bradley James, who portrays Arthur, contests, such an interpretation of Lancelot and his secret desires is easy to come to:

> The legends are very dark and Arthur and Lancelot were the best of friends. And in some legends that you read, Lancelot was in love with Arthur and because he couldn't have him, he turned his attention to Guinevere because that was the only piece of Arthur he could have. Uh, we're not going to go down that road.[65]

James' statement acknowledges the erotic history of the 'Arthur/Lancelot'[66] relationship and the impossibility of its exploration in *Merlin*. However, while not explored, this homoerotic history is certainly implied through the series.

In S04E02 (the episode in which Lancelot dies in an act of self-sacrifice), for example, Merlin seems to suspect it is something more than knightly obligation that drives Lancelot to protect Arthur. Merlin's suspicions are confirmed when Lancelot tells him, 'You wouldn't understand. It doesn't make any sense to me either.' There appears to be something greater than duty driving Lancelot's need to protect Arthur, something Lancelot is keeping secret, such as a supernatural directive or inappropriate desire. Lancelot does not believe even Merlin—who has shared with him his own deepest secret (that he is a sorcerer in a realm where sorcery is outlawed)—would

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understand. When asked by Merlin in the same episode whether he still thinks of Guinevere, Lancelot replies, 'No. Arthur's a better man than me.' It is cryptic statements like these that align the Lancelot of *Merlin* with the Lancelot of legend, a figure shrouded in secrecy and one who, in some iterations of the legend, as James notes, attempts to deflect his sexual desires for Arthur onto Guinevere.

While truth as it relates to Lancelot is ultimately at the discretion of the viewer, that he loved Arthur or Merlin in a way beyond the homosocial and the platonic is as supported a position in the series as that he loved Guinevere. In the aforementioned episode, for example, when he hears that Merlin intends to sacrifice himself for Arthur, Lancelot expresses doubt about whether he could display such bravery. And it seems that what convinces him, what inspires him to make the ultimate sacrifice, the ultimate noble act, instead of allowing Merlin to do it, are Merlin's last words to him: 'You have to have a reason, something you care about. Something that's more important than anything.' And while we do not know what Lancelot's reason is (his vow to Guinevere at the start of the mission: that he would protect Arthur with his life? His affection for Merlin? His love for Arthur?), we know that he has found it because as he walks through the tear in the veil between the worlds, he is smiling. Whatever awaits him in the realm of the dead, he finds peace knowing he has proven himself, as Kilgharrah the dragon had known he would, 'the bravest and most noble of them all' (S04E02).

Arthur confirms Kilgharrah's prophecy in a eulogy he delivers following Lancelot's sacrifice:

> I want to pay tribute to Sir Lancelot. We owe him a great debt. It is not just his deed that we will never forget. It's his courage, his compassion, his unselfish heart. He is the most noble knight I will ever know. He gave his life for all of us.

There is a gravitas to Arthur's words, but also an emphasis on qualities that speak to the romaticism of the figure: 'his compassion, his unselfish heart.' Arthur's interaction with Lancelot is unlike his engagement with any other man. There is a reverance in the manner in which Arthur speaks to and about Lancelot, a reverance and a longing. It is not necessarily a sexual longing, although a slash fan of the series would certainly see it as so; it is a longing to have close a man who possesses all Arthur must possess himself. Arthur knows the burden of courage and struggles with it especially in this episode when he faces the prospect of giving up his own life. That Lancelot takes that burden from him is, in a chivalric age, the purest gesture of love. We see this signified in Arthur's face during this scene. War writers often idolize the sacrificed and the killed, and often in homoerotic ways.[67] Idolization is certainly what Arthur expresses through his eulogy, as is a love for Lancelot that is entirely homosocially appropriate, yet also potentially erotic. For despite his death coming without the iconic betrayal with Guinevere, a

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decision unprecedented in retellings of the legend, it makes sense here. The Lancelot of *Merlin* is incapable of betraying Arthur because he is too noble. This is what makes the series' decision to revive the character—presumably for the purpose of addressing this crucial aspect of the literature—so cruel (see S04E09).

The latency of the program's suggestiveness only lends further credence to a queer reading of the Arthur/Lancelot pairing, which itself is a process of bringing to the surface ambiguous sexuality. Such a reading also creates the possibility of an additional pairing, Merlin/Lancelot. James' description is most likely based on the portrayal of Lancelot in White's 1958 *The Once and Future King* (*TOAFK*), which is a composite of four books: *The Sword in the Stone* (1938), *The Queen of Air and Darkness* (1939), *The Ill-Made Knight* (1940), and *The Candle in the Wind* (first published in the 1958 complete edition).

Malory lamented the time in which he lived, setting his stories in an idolized past of his own imagining.[68] While the nineteenth century saw a revival of Arthurian retellings based on Malory—such as William Morris, Algernon Charles Swinburne, and Tennyson—White's twentieth-century *TOAFK* is significant as arguably the last successful adaptation of Malory's text.[69] It is unique among renditions of Arthurian legend as it does not extend back to more primative, less chivalric times.[70] Like Malory, White despaired of his contemporary world, saddened by the Second World War and the millions of lives it claimed. This led him to write of the past, and reach for a nobler time, graced by the chivalric tradition.[71] Rewriting Malory provided an avenue of escapism for White, as his 1928–29 journal reveals: 'If one can't escape from life one can at any rate escape from lust. Escape is a thing whose beauties continue to strike me with increasing vigour.'[72]

Kurth Sprague explains White's desire for escape through reference to a scene in *TOAFK* where Lancelot desires a miracle, as though it were that 'one other thing which was still possible in those days.'[73] This of course refers to Lancelot's miraculous healing of Sir Urry of Hungary from Malory, which legions before him had failed to achieve. The phrase 'in those days' carries the love and hope White invested in the past, and the contempt he held for the present; 'for "in those days" such love of man for man, so clean and perfect, was possible and admirable, and the hope of performing a miracle was a laudable ambition, capable of fulfillment.'[74] It is appropriate that Lancelot should be the one to utter such wistful words because he was White's self-character as he had been Malory's. The appeal of Lancelot for White was his unparalleled nobility and honor, but also his capacity to contain White's secret desires, expressed so appropriately in the line 'such love of man for man.'

Like Malory before him, White uses *TOAFK* to comment on the period of his text's composition. He goes so far as to have Merlin, who lives through time backwards, make anachronistic allusions to the political climate of

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the day, which includes a warning about 'an Austrian who . . . plunged the civilized world into misery and chaos.'[75] As a closeted homosexual, White is no doubt influenced by the treatment of homosexual soldiers of his day and the entrenchment of homophobia in the military, especially considering he applied to join the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve in 1941.[76] Men in this period who did not display suitably masculine aggressiveness were routinely accused of homosexuality[77] and were seen to pose 'unquestionable harm to "normal" soldiers.'[78] Lancelot becomes a 'surrogate character' for these desires and frustrations.

Homosexuality was a persistent preoccupation for White. He began a novel about his first experience of homosexual love during a year he spent in Italy in the late 1920s, but abandoned it due to the climate of the day and uncertainty of publication.[79] This preoccupation also found its way into his more fictional writing. Leslie B. Mittleman describes White's sexuality as one of the 'hidden keys' to *TOAFK*.[80] The need for secrecy dictated by his society meant the sexuality of White's Lancelot is manifested in subtextual and often tortured ways. *The Ill-Made Knight* is the longest book of the *TOAFK* collection, and focuses predominately on Lancelot. White describes Lancelot as having a face 'as ugly as a monster's in the King's menagerie' and as comparable to 'an African ape.'[81] This is likely based on his own self-loathing and a low opinion of his appearance, as suggested by his personal journals[82] and his biographer, Sylvia T. Warner.[83] This is of course a major departure from Malory and the Arthurian corpus, which is incessant in its portrayal of this knight as extraordinarily handsome. As Sprague recounts:

> In the early pages of *Knight*, Lancelot is depicted as an ugly boy in the throes of hero-worship, savagely dedicated to the lonely work of making himself a knight worthy of his king. He is a boy with a disabling sense of his own unworthiness and of old sin. These attributes, the ugliness and unworthiness, and the sense of old sin, were themselves vital parts of White's own self-appraisal.[84]

White creates a much more tormented Lancelot than that of tradition, one filled with 'unspecified blame,' which invites readings of cloaked sexuality.[85] White is explicit about this, writing that Lancelot 'thought that there was something wrong with him' and telling readers they 'do not have to dabble in a place which he preferred to keep secret.'[86] In what is yet another departure from Malory, White introduces readers to Lancelot via an account of his deep affection for Arthur, which began with a conversation they had when he was a boy. White writes, 'Lancelot . . . had been thinking of King Arthur with all his might. He was in love with him.'[87] In his journals, White reflects on the prospect of dying alone: 'My life is a lonely one. Healthy adults would think this a contemptible confession, I fear, but I have only one thing in the world: a dog.'[88] This is where the characters of White and his Lancelot depart, as White permits the character an ending he could not obtain himself. White's

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confession of loneliness invites comparison with the Lancelot of *Merlin*, a character who, while having a handsome exterior, has an even more tortured existence than White's Lancelot. While in White Lancelot bears his scars and misfortune on his exterior as well as within, *Merlin*'s Lancelot is denied the ability to act on his affections for Guinevere (except as a shade, a mere shadow of his former self), and yet is still disgraced.

In S04E09, Morgana, desperate not to see her former servant on the throne, resurrects Lancelot from death after hearing of Arthur's intention to marry Guinevere; she then has the shade of Lancelot return to Camelot to seduce Guinevere and disrupt the king's marriage plans. Even Morgana recognizes Lancelot's noble nature, and his legacy, both of which she destroys in this episode: 'For you, Lancelot the noble, the brave, the honorable, you're everything the knights' code stands for.' Under Morgana's direction Lancelot seduces Guinevere, who has been enchanted via a bracelet he gives her. The affair begins with Guinevere not of her own mind and Lancelot not of his own will. Arthur discovers them and throws them both in the dungeons. On Morgana's final order the shade takes his own life. After Lancelot's body is discovered, Arthur says, 'Lancelot was a man of honor; see to it that he receives a proper burial.' Arthur banishes Guinevere from Camelot. He never learns what truly transpired, believing that Lancelot—who in that same episode he called 'the most noble of my knights'—had betrayed him. Merlin is the only one to attend Lancelot's burial, at which, using magic, he frees his soul from the corruption of the shade. The events of this episode mark a major departure from many Arthurian retellings, in which the affair of Guinevere and Lancelot is a permanent fixture.

Merlin's pre-watershed family drama format makes it likely that the decision to have Morgana bear the responsibility for this important plot point has to do with redemption and desserts, as Gaius (the court physician and Merlin's guardian) had foreshadowed in Lancelot's first appearance in the series. Adultery is inexcusable during 'family hour.' The only way viewers can forgive Guinevere is if it was an affair not of her own volition, which is why it is necessary for viewers to know of the bracelet; as far as the characters themselves are aware, Merlin included, Guinevere succumbed to her residual feelings for Lancelot. This bracelet (that waters down an essential component of Arthurian legend: intent) encourages viewers to rally for the wrongly accused Guinevere and hope for her eventual reunion with Arthur, which becomes a testament to their insummontable love story. That Arthur believes genuine adultery to have occurred only affirms his good nature when he forgives her, even though there was nothing to forgive. It is a happy ending Guinevere would not be entitled to had she willingly betrayed Arthur; for an adulterous woman, even today, in the opinion of many does not deserve

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redemption. Arthur actor James agrees with this assessment of Guinevere in the series and the device of the enchanted bracelet specifically:

> I think they've always given Guinevere a get-out-of-jail clause . . . They had a moment last year where Gwen kisses Lancelot and then went, 'Right, we'll put a magical bracelet in to make it all right.' That was quite a late addition to the script, because they were afraid of demonizing her character. I've always felt that they could have gone a bit further with that.[89]

Her innocence also allows for another key variant from the legend: Guinevere's ascent to the throne.

The impact of this variation on Arthurian literature is significant given the importance of the Arthur/Guinevere/Lancelot love triangle. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that the love or 'erotic' triangle, which often features two rival males competing for a woman's affection, is deeply homoerotic.[90] In these triangles the female becomes a conduit for male same-sex desire.[91] Such triangles, which Sedgwick also terms 'homosocial triangles,'[92] allow for desire between men that would not have an appropriate outlet were it not for the woman. This triangle is abolished in S04E09. It is substituted with a much more conservative Arthur/Guinevere/Morgana triangle. While such a female-male-female triangle might promote femslash fan readings (female/female pairings), its impact on Lancelot is a sullying of his fine name. It betrays *Merlin*'s Lancelot even more than other retellings. Destruction of the homosocial triangle also deeroticizes the Arthur/Lancelot pairing. Arthur's instruction for a proper burial for Lancelot does not mean forgiveness; it symbolizes Arthur's sad realization that he was wrong, that Lancelot is not special, that he did not love Arthur more than any other, for if he had, he would never have betrayed him. Lancelot, while 'a man of honor' and thus deserving of a proper burial, in death becomes a man like any other. In other words, Arthur uncovers the chivalric fallacy, which divorces him from the chivalric setting and all its homosexual implications. There is an uncanny similarity between the White journal entry quoted earlier and what Lancelot tells Guinevere in S02E04 when they reunite after his self-imposed exile: 'I have little to live for . . . For all my words. For all that I believed. I have come to nothing.' Aside from the loneliness there is hopelessness, a sense of defeat; what once worked—for White, escapism and for Lancelot, swordsmanship—no longer does.

In White, Lancelot's unsightly visage makes his affair more than skin deep; it is a pure love that 'goes right to the heart.'[93] The narration reveals that Lancelot even initially regards Guinevere as competition: 'it was hardest of all to have broken his body for the older man's ideal, only to find this mincing wife stepping in at the end of it to snatch away his love at no cost at all. Lancelot was jealous of Guenever.'[94] It is a jealousy that bewilders even Merlin, who is unable to reconcile the consuming affection Lancelot

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harbors for Arthur.[95] This reveals the love that develops between Lancelot and Guinevere to be one that transcends the physical. It is also one, as James notes, of deference, where Guinevere becomes 'the only piece of Arthur he could have.'[96] James' take on the Lancelot/Guinevere romance is particularly evident in Bradley. Both White's and *Merlin*'s Lancelots devote themselves obsessively to the lonely life of swordsmanship and hero worship. However while White's Lancelot—even after the betrayal of Arthur—is granted a measure of redemption and retains his title of the best knight the world has known, *Merlin*'s Lancelot, in addition to being denied Guinevere's affections, also loses his most prized possession: his noble name.

COMPARING *MERLIN*'S LANCELOT WITH BRADLEY'S

Bradley's late twentieth-century Arthurian retelling *The Mists of Avalon* continues the tradition of a homosexual Lancelot. While his queer sexuality is more obvious here, unfortunately Bradley is also less sympathetic in her treatment. *Avalon* makes explicit Lancelot's forbidden desire for Arthur, who is his cousin in this adaptation. Unable to act on these desires, he propels himself into relationships with women, including Morgana, Morgause, and Guinevere, the last of which he admits is in part because of her proximity to Arthur. Morgana and Guinevere are Bradley's protagonists in this feminist retelling. In desperation Lancelot confides in Morgana his affections for Arthur. She is disgusted with Lancelot's confession, the implications of which cause her to 'shrink back . . . in horror.'[97] This is despite her engaging in lesbian affairs herself. Lancelot's affair with Guinevere destroys his friendship with Arthur. Morgana then assists in tricking Lancelot into a loveless marriage with Guinevere's cousin, Elaine, claiming their first born for herself. He eventually retreats into the priesthood.

James Noble is critical of Bradley's treatment of Lancelot's homosexuality, arguing that her demythologizing of homosexuality in the text amounts 'to little more than tokenism.'[98] Further, he argues that her portrayal of Lancelot 'is more homophobic than anything else.'[99] This is given the pains taken to emphasize the extent to which Lancelot is disempowered by his sexual orientation, with Bradley repeatedly inventing 'opportunities to accentuate the suffering that accompanies this disempowerment.'[100] As Noble summarizes:

> In short, if Bradley's treatment of Lancelot does not suggest, at least by implication, that he *deserves* to suffer as he does because of his sexual orientation, it is a treatment which ultimately acquiesces to a value system one might have expected to see challenged in a much more radical fashion in a contemporary treatment of the Arthurian legend which specifically addresses itself to the plight of the homosexual living within the confines and the social constructs of a patriarchal order.[101]

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Avalon has been praised for advocating women and favorably treating lesbian encounters between many of the characters, including Morgana, Morgause, Ygraine, and Nimue. Bradley's work makes a significant contribution to lesbian fiction, and in *Avalon* scenes between Morgana and the Fairy Queen and Raven are portrayed affectionately. Had she treated Lancelot in a similar fashion as she did the aforementioned women, not only would she have granted him the opportunity to 'come to terms with his sexuality, but also to claim it as a source of personal power and pride.'[102] Given that I have speculated on how Malory's and White's personal histories affect their versions of Arthurian legend, it seems appropriate to postulate that Bradley's treatment of Lancelot and his destructive desires may have been influenced by her experience with a man consumed by destructive homosexual desires of his own.

Avalon was published in 1983. Bradley's husband, Walter H. Breen, was convicted of child molestation in 1990. He died in prison in 1993 while serving a ten-year sentence. A negligence suit was filed against Bradley in 1998 by one of her husband's victims, alleging her knowledge and compliance in her husband's pedophilia. In her deposition[103] in the Californian Superior Court, Bradley admits to having had knowledge of her husband's predilection for young boys before and during their marriage. Throughout their marriage she shielded and defended her husband from allegations of child abuse, being aware of his intercourse with boys of fourteen and under. The case was settled out of court by her estate following her death in 1999. Breen had been previously arrested in 1954 for molesting children under a boardwalk in Atlantic City. He authored the 1964 *Greek Love*, which was written under the pseudonym J.Z. Eglinton;[104] this was the year he married Bradley. In the book he argues that homosexual interaction between men and boys is 'true' homosexuality, which has been usurped by homosexual relations between adult males.[105] He founded the *International Journal of Greek Love* in 1965, to which Bradley contributed an article on lesbian pederasty.[106]

Bradley was aware of her husband's more-than-academic interest in young boys, defending his sexual affair with a fourteen-year-old in her deposition. They separated in 1979, the same year Bradley wrote a gay-themed novel, *The Catch Trap*, which focuses on the homosexual affair of an adult male and underage boy, Tommy, aged fourteen.[107] The couple remained close, living on the same street, with Breen occupying a house Bradley owned, known notoriously as the 'gold fishbowl,' and being in her employ. While still married, Breen carried out much of his abuse in this house just a few doors down from Bradley. That is until 1990, when Bradley divorced him shortly before he was charged with child molestation for his abuse of a twelve-year-old boy. Bradley learned of the impending charge from her secretary and cousin, Elisabeth Waters, who alleges to have been Bradley's lover.[108]

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Given this history, it is hardly surprising that a divide between lesbian and homosexual representation is so obvious in *Avalon*. The former is positive and, as Noble points out, a source of personal power and pride, while the latter is homophobic, presenting homosexuality as destructive and a source of shame and disgrace. If Lancelot was Malory's and White's self-character, it seems plausible that Morgana was Bradley's, with her husband cast as Lancelot. In the novel, when Morgana reacts in disgust to Lancelot's confession of homosexuality, it is a reaction driven by her own impossible desires for him. Bradley alleges in her deposition to have had a similar reaction to learning of her husband's intercourse with male children, although she never acted to prevent further abuse. In 1980 Breen and Bradley were ordained in the Holy Apostolic-Catholic Church of the East, which aligns Lancelot's retreat into the priesthood in the novel with the modern state of the Catholic Church, an institution so embroiled in similar controversy today. Even Lancelot's three children—the first of which Morgana demands be sacrificed to be reared in Avalon—invites comparison with Breen's first daughter to Bradley, who alleged her father sexually abused her. This goes a long way toward explaining why Bradley vilifies Lancelot's same-sex desire while Morgana's sexuality is praised.

Bradley's decision to label Lancelot's sexuality a curse condemns him to a fate similar to *Merlin*'s Lancelot: a life of loneliness and disgrace of his good name. Her sympathetic treatment of lesbianism also signifies a greater modern acceptance of lesbian desire. *Merlin* co-producer Murphy, for example, while categorically denying male homosexual metaphor, is more than willing to entertain female eroticism in his 'family show.' 'I gave you Morgause,' he tells Morgana actress Katie McGrath in their audio commentary for S05E13. 'Incestuous lesbianism, what more do you want?' He then qualifies this by saying it was the actresses who brought that eroticism to the screen. 'It's a family show,' he says. 'Not in your head,' McGrath replies. McGrath's challenge of Murphy's stance of innocence (or willful ignorance) when it comes to claims of suggestion in *Merlin* highlights the value of a queer approach to characters such as Lancelot, a homosexual figure in the heads of select adaptors of the legend, many scholars, and many more slash fans. As has been shown, Lancelot's tragic and tortured nature in adaptations of the legend can usefully be understood via a metaphor of secret sexuality, and as the result of his devotion to the chivalric myth.

CONCLUSION

If chivalry is, as Keen suggests, 'a polite veneer,' a means of relief from 'the bloodiness of life,' Lancelot—as he appears in Malory, White, Bradley, and the BBC's *Merlin*—exists in a perpetual state of denial, devoting his life to ideals and promises spelled out by the fantasy of chivalry. In this article I

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postulate that Lancelot's inability to reconcile his reality with the romance he aspires to resembles the burden of secret sexuality. Lancelot is the most enigmatic of Arthurian figures; he was the self-character for Malory and White, who bestowed on him all the characteristics of the chivalric tradition. These authors, too, sought escape from the bloodiness of their own lives, and so Lancelot came to personify romance and a primal desire we all have to escape our day. The injection of these desires and anxieties curdles within the Lancelot character, who struggles—adaptation after adaptation—to sustain faith in the impossible pursuit of perfection, and is ultimately destroyed by his inevitable failure.

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NOTES

I am deeply indebted to the anonymous readers of Arthuriana and Dorsey Armstrong for thoughtful suggestions that have greatly improved this article.

1 T.S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), p. 31.

2 See Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958). Also see Frank R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948). Leavis is a well-known advocate of such divisions; he proposes the word 'civilization' as a more apt descriptor for popular texts, its connotations more modest than those of 'culture.'

3 Antony Easthope, *Literary into Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 6. Also see Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

4 While acknowledging the tradition of male eroticism in Arthurian legend, actor Bradley James (who portrays Arthur in *Merlin*), also recognizes the limitations of his series in so far as it is able to explore such themes: 'We're only going to be able to go so far with the show and the genre it is in terms of how dark the actual legends go, because they're twisted. Some of the Arthur Lancelot stuff I've read is just stuff you couldn't do, for example, in England on a Saturday night

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on BBC One.' See Bradley James being interviewed by Jenna Busch of *Fanhattan* (15 November 2012), [http://blog.fanhattan.com/2012/11/15/merlin-season-5-bradley-james-answers-your-questions/]; accessed 10 December 2014. Andrew B.R. Elliott's article on Arthurian television serialization supports James' views on the limitations of the series. Elliott makes the case that while television has the potential to offer 'a breadth of scope in the stories it tells,' 'the recent BBC production of *Merlin*' has a 'narrow scope.' See Andrew B.R. Elliott, 'The Charm of the (Re)making: Problems of Arthurian Television Serialization,' *Arthuriana* 21.4 (2011): 64–65 [53–67].

5 Cult television can be defined as a complex interaction among television texts, discourses about them, and the fan practices these texts inspire. See Matt Hills, 'Defining Cult TV: Texts, Inter-texts, and Fan Audiences,' in *The Television Studies Reader*, ed. Robert Clyde Allen and Annette Hill (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 509–10. For an exploration of the contours of cult television, also see Sara Gwenllian-Jones and Roberta E. Pearson, ed., *Cult Television* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

6 In situating this article's queer reading of Lancelot in the tradition of debates surrounding popular and high culture, there are important arguments that are omitted. For an in-depth discussion of these issues, see John Seabrook, *Nobrow: The Culture of Marketing, the Marketing of Culture* (London: Methuen, 2000) and Williams, *Culture and Society*.

7 See Kurth Sprague, 'The Troubled Heart of T.H. White: Women and *The Once and Future King*,' *Arthuriana* 16.3 (2006): 1–197.

8 For while *Merlin* retells the legend, for the most part it is bound to iconic narratives on which it is based. Series co-producer Julian Murphy confirms the program's obligation to faithful transcription in the audio commentary for the final episode (S05E13), 'it has that weight of history,' he says.

9 The term 'slash' derives from the tradition among fans of using a forward slash to denote homoerotic pairings, such as Arthur/Lancelot or Merlin/Arthur. See Joanna Russ, 'Pornography by Women for Women, with Love,' in *Magic Mommas, Trembling Sisters, Puritans, and Perverts: Feminist Essays*, ed. Joanna Russ (Trumansburg: Crossing Press, 1985), pp. 79–99. Slash works are often adult in nature, which for *Merlin* slash fans can result in conflict with the television program's creators, given the program's family target market. Resultantly, and despite homoerotic undertones, series co-producer Murphy takes the unequivocal position that: 'On no level is magic metaphorical [of homosexuality] in this series.' (audio commentary for S05E13) It is a statement that ushers back to a 2008 proclamation (audible at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TzoqNhMdRVM]) by fellow producer Johnny Capps of the platonic nature of the Merlin/Arthur relationship; accessed 10 December 2014.

10 Such texts have been the topic of investigation by scholars. I use a case study of visual slash—the combinatory digital manipulation of images of characters from popular media and gay pornography—inspired by *Merlin*. See my, 'Slash Manips: Remixing Popular Media with Gay Pornography,' *M/C Journal: A Journal of*

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Media and Culture 16.4 (2013). [http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/677]; accessed 10 December 2013. Sibylle Machat examines *Merlin* slash videos and fan trailers in '"Prince Arthur Spotted Exiting Buckingham Palace!": The Re-Imagined Worlds of Fanfic Trailers,' in *Film Remakes, Adaptations and Fan Productions: Remake/Remodel*, ed. Kathleen Loock and Constantine Verevis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 197–214.

11 Queer can be defined as 'whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant' and is 'available to anyone who is or feels marginalized because of her or his sexual practices.' See David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Toward a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 62.

12 'Queer' is an undecided term, neither gay nor straight, with an unfixed nature that makes it useful for the delineation of 'peculiar' medieval character depictions that could not rightly be labeled either way. See Richard E. Zeikowitz, *Homoeroticism and Chivalry: Discourses of Male Same-Sex Desire in the 14th Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 67.

13 Glenn Burger, *Chaucer's Queer Nation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. xii.

14 Zeikowitz, *Homoeroticism and Chivalry*, p. 71.

15 Karma Lochrie, 'Mystical Acts, Queer Tendencies,' in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Karma Lochrie, James Schultz, and Peggy McCracken (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 180 [pp. 180–200].

16 Glenn Burger and Steven F. Kruger, 'Introduction,' in *Queering the Middle Ages*, ed. Glenn Burger and Steven F. Kruger (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. xvi [pp. i–xxiii].

17 Roberta Davidson, 'When King Arthur is PG-13,' *Arthuriana* 22.3 (2012): 13–14 [5–20].

18 Davidson, 'When King Arthur is PG-13,' 14. See M.K. Hume, *King Arthur: Dragon's Child*; *King Arthur: Warrior of the West*; *King Arthur: The Bloody Cup* (London: Headline Review, 2009–10).

19 Davidson, 'When King Arthur is PG-13,' 13. See Joan Wolf, *The Road to Avalon* (Boston: Dutton, 1988).

20 Davidson, 'When King Arthur is PG-13,' 13–14.

21 Davidson, 'When King Arthur is PG-13,' 14. Rosemary Sutcliff, *The Sword at Sunset* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1963).

22 Mary Renault's historical novels are set in ancient Greece and focus primarily on male characters. Her works are significant for their sympathetic treatment of homosexuality. See Ruth Hoberman, 'Masquing the Phallus: Genital Ambiguity in Mary Renault's Historical Novels,' *Twentieth Century Literature* 42.2 (1996): 277–93.

23 Davidson, 'When King Arthur is PG-13,' 14.

24 Queer theory concerns itself with the ways in which homosexual subjectivity is produced by and excluded from culture. See Ki Namaste, 'The Politics of Inside/Out: Queer Theory, Poststructuralism, and a Sociological Approach to Sexuality,' *Sociological Theory* 12.2 (1994): 220 [220–31]. Also see Annamarie Jagose, *Queer*

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Theory (Melbourne: University of Melbourne Press, 1996), p. 2, who argues that queer theory's debunking of stable sexes, genders, and sexualities can be best understood as a specifically gay and lesbian reworking of a poststructuralist view of identity as a constellation of multiple and unstable positions.

25 Like in White's *TOAFK*, Lancelot is absolute in his devotion to Arthur from the moment they meet, a devotion fortified by the impossibility of being with Guinevere.

26 Detailing the modern intentions behind the series, executive producers Capps and Murphy explain: '[W]e're probably more influenced by something like *Smallville* [2001–11] than we are by something like Malory, because I think the struggle is to make this contemporary.' See Johnny Capps and Julian Murphy interview with Michael Idato of *The Age* (30 April 2009), [http://www.theage.com.au/news/entertainment/tv--radio/young-merlin-works-magic-in-camelot/2009/04/28/1240684466509.html]; accessed 10 December 2014.

27 For White, see Sprague, 'The Troubled Heart of T.H. White,' p. 143. For Bradley, see James Noble, 'Feminism, Homosexuality and Homophobia in *The Mists of Avalon*,' in *Culture and the King: The Social Implications of the Arthurian Legend*, ed. Martin B. Shichtman and James P. Carley (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), p. 291 [pp. 288–96].

28 All references to *Le Morte d'Arthur* are from the Penguin edition based on Caxton's version (Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, ed. Janet Cowen, 2 vols. [London: Penguin, 1969]), rather than Vinaver's edition (Thomas Malory, *Works*, ed. Eugène Vinaver, 3 vols., 3rd edn., rev. P.J.C. Field [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990]), which is based on the Winchester manuscript.

29 Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Tennyson: A Selected Edition*, ed. Christopher Ricks (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

30 T.H. White, *The Once and Future King* (New York: GP Putnam's Sons, 1958).

31 Marion Zimmer Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1982).

32 References to *Le Morte Darthur* here are based on the Caxton version (see note 28); however, it is worth noting that Tennyson's, White's, and Bradley's adaptations are not confined to any one version of Malory. See Fernando Galván, 'Malory Revisited: From Caxton to Steinbeck,' *Selim: Journal of the Spanish Society for Medieval English Language and Literature* 8 (1998): 42–43 [35–76]. For more on their respective texts' relationship to Malory, see Roger Simpson, *Camelot Regained: The Arthurian Revival and Tennyson 1800–1849* (Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 1990), pp. 190–254 for Tennyson; and Sprague, 'The Troubled Heart of T.H. White,' pp. 48–49 for White.

33 Charlotte Spivack and Roberta L. Staples, *The Company of Camelot: Arthurian Characters in Romance and Fantasy* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994), p. 130.

34 Worthington, 'From Children's Story to Adult Fiction,' p. 97.

35 For a discussion of the feminist tradition and an overview of contemporary Arthurian literature authored by women, Bradley's *Avalon* included, see Alan Lupack and Barbara T. Lupack, eds., *Arthurian Literature by Women: An Anthology* (New

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York: Routledge, 2013). Also see Jan Shaw, 'Feminism and the Fantasy Tradition: *The Mists of Avalon*,' in *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. Helen Fulton (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 463–77. Concerning White's treatment of women, see Heather Worthington, 'From Children's Story to Adult Fiction: T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*,' *Arthuriana* 12.2 (2002): 98 [97–119], who argues that *TOAFK* 'allowed White a textual space in which to explore his ambivalent feelings towards his mother and women generally.' For a consideration of women (in relation to magic and morality) in *Merlin*, see Elysse T. Meredith, 'Gendering Morals, Magic and Medievalism in the BBC's *Merlin*,' in *The Middle Ages on Television: Critical Essays*, ed. Meriem Pagès and Karolyn Kinane (Jefferson: McFarland, 2015), p. 168 [pp. 158–73], who argues that when women in the series wield magical power it is generally 'religious, mystical, and evil.'

36 For consistency, Arthurian spellings are as they are billed in *Merlin*. This is to avoid confusion over characters, the most obvious being *Merlin*'s 'Gwaine,' who more commonly appears as 'Gawain.'

37 For discussion of the potential for lesbian readings in Malory, see Kathleen C. Kelly, 'The Writable Lesbian and Lesbian Desire in Malory's *Morte Darthur*,' *Exemplaria* 14.2 (2002): 239–70. For a reading of lesbian subtext in Bradley, see Marilyn R. Farwell, 'Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Subtexts: Toward a Theory of Lesbian Narrative Space in Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*,' in *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*, ed. Thelma S. Fenster (New York: Garland, 1996), pp. 319–30.

38 See Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur* (London: Penguin, 1969), pp. 115–16.

39 Abril-Sánchez, 'The Medieval Orders of Knights and Their Historical Exemplary Nature of the Arthurian Myth,' pp. 22–23.

40 See Dorsey Armstrong, *Gender and the Chivalric Community in Malory's Morte d'Arthur* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), p. 220.

41 See Norris J. Lacy, ed., *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation, 3 Lancelot,* 2 parts (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), I, pp. 111–14. Also see Richard W. Barber, *The Reign of Chivalry* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), p. 98.

42 Lacy, *Lancelot-Grail*, p. 113.

43 See Gertrude C. Drake, 'Candidus: A Unifying Theme in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*,' *The Classical Journal* 64.3 (1968): 102–09.

44 See Shirley Marchalonis, '*Sir Gowther*: The Process of a Romance,' *The Chaucer Review* (1971): 14–29.

45 See Vincent J. Cheng, 'White Horse, Dark Horse: Joyce's Allhorse of Another Color,' *Joyce Studies Annual* 2.1 (1991): 101–28.

46 See Dorothy L. Hurley, 'Seeing White: Children of Color and the Disney Fairy Tale Princess,' *The Journal of Negro Education* 74.3 (2005): 221–32.

47 'There are times, Merlin, when you display a sort of . . . I don't know what it is. I want to say . . . It's not wisdom.' (*Arthur*, S03E02)

48 For a discussion of the symbolic associations between white and feminine, see Gün R. Semin and Tomás A. Palma, 'Why the Bride Wears White: Grounding Gender with Brightness,' *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 24.2 (2014): 217–25.

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49 For more on the representation of women (and their use of magic) in *Merlin*, see Meredith, 'Gendering Morals, Magic and Medievalism in the BBC's *Merlin*.'

50 See Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study of Forms of Life, Thought, and Art in France and the Netherlands in the Dawn of the Renaissance*, trans. Fritz Hopman (London: Edward Arnold and Co., 1924).

51 However, its origins date back to the Roman Empire and the seventh-century Arab world with Muslim chivalry, or *fatuwwat*. For more on the origins of chivalry, see Jorge Abril-Sánchez, 'The Medieval Orders of Knights and their Historical Exemplary Nature of the Arthurian Myth,' in *Avalon Revisited: Reworkings of the Arthurian Myth*, ed. María José Álvarez-Faedo (Berna: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 22–23 [pp. 21–46].

52 Abril-Sánchez, 'The Medieval Orders of Knights and their Historical Exemplary Nature of the Arthurian Myth,' p. 23.

53 From birth, candidates for knighthood received special treatment, which included lavish gifts and dominion over vast territories. See Leon Gautier, *Chivalry* (London: Phoenix House, 1965), pp. 34–39. A candidate would also undergo years of training to prepare him for knighthood; this included military studies, swordsmanship, foreign languages (such as French), and embodiment of the Seven Christian Virtues: faith, hope, charity, prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. See Ernest K. Milliken, *Chivalry in the Middle Ages* (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1968), pp. 20–21.

54 Walter C. Meller, *A Knight's Life in the Days of Chivalry* (London: T. Werner Laurie Ltd., 1924), p. 5.

55 George P.R. James, *The History of Chivalry* (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830), p. 17.

56 Abril-Sánchez, 'The Medieval Orders of Knights and their Historical Exemplary Nature of the Arthurian Myth,' p. 42.

57 Abril-Sánchez argues that the principles of medieval chivalry taken from popular Arthurian romances and chivalric texts spurred noblemen to action, taking law into their own hands in an attempt to restore the Age of Chivalry, which often resulted in bloody turf wars and the deaths of peasants. See 'The Medieval Orders of Knights and their Historical Exemplary Nature of the Arthurian Myth,' p. 43.

58 Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 3.

59 As quoted in Jackson J. Benson, *The True Adventures of John Steinbeck, Writer* (New York: Viking Press, 1984), pp. 810–11.

60 Donald L. Hoffman, 'Perceval's Sister: Malory's "Rejected" Masculinities,' *Arthuriana* 6.4 (1996): 72 [72–84]. Italics are original to the quoted text.

61 Hoffman, 'Perceval's Sister,' 72.

62 Hoffman, 'Perceval's Sister,' 72. Italics are original to the quoted text.

63 Hoffman, 'Perceval's Sister,' 72. Also see Ying-Hsiu Lu, 'Malory's Lancelot: Homosocial and Heterosexual Discourses in the Knightly Ideal of Masculinity,' *Kaleidoscope* 5.1 (2013): 4–16, who considers Lancelot's masculinity in Malory through the lens of homosociality.

64 Ruth M. Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), p. 62.

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65 Bradley James interview with Crystal Taylor at San Diego Comic-Con (July 2011), [http://suite101.com/article/bradley-james-talks-arthur-and-lancelot-in-season-4-of-merlin-a400729]; accessed 10 December 2014.
66 The tradition of using a forward slash to denote homoerotic pairings, such as Arthur/Lancelot or Merlin/Arthur, is employed here in recognition of the queer readings that *Merlin* slash fans have already, and continue to, enact using these characters.
67 Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 119–20.
68 Sprague, 'The Troubled Heart of T.H. White,' p. 144.
69 Worthington, 'From Children's Story to Adult Fiction,' p. 97.
70 Worthington, 'From Children's Story to Adult Fiction,' p. 97.
71 Malory and White writing of more nostalgic times to escape the reality of their day invite comparison with Superman television series *Smallville* and *Merlin*. *Smallville*'s small Kansas town namesake is a place 'where people are good to one another and extraordinary things happen all the time.' See Cary M. Jones, 'Twenty-First Century Superman: *Smallville* and New Media Mythmaking,' *Jump Cut* 48 (2006). [http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc48.2006/SmallvilleFans/index.html]. Accessed 10 December 2013. This is of course in contrast to realities of crime, prejudice, and general social degradation in Middle America. *Merlin* is also concerned with nostalgic constructions of space, as is revealed by its opening: 'In a land of myth, and a time of magic.' In *Merlin*, Camelot is not a place of famine, filth, debauchery, and disease—as it is portrayed in more 'adult' retellings of Arthurian legend, such as the 2004 film, *King Arthur*, or the short-lived 2011 cable series, *Camelot*—it is a time of noble men and magic, of romantic heroes and the pure of heart.
72 As quoted in Sprague, 'The Troubled Heart of T.H. White,' p. 19.
73 Sprague, 'The Troubled Heart of T.H. White,' p. 144.
74 Sprague, 'The Troubled Heart of T.H. White,' p. 144.
75 Sprague, 'The Troubled Heart of T.H. White,' pp. 266–67.
76 Janet Montefiore, 'England's Ancient and Modern: Sylvia Townsend Warner, T.H. White and the Fictions of Medieval Englishness,' in *Intermodernism: Literary Culture in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain*, ed. Kristin Bluemel (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 38 [38–55].
77 Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, A History* (New York: Viking, 2005), p. 206.
78 Naoko Wake, 'The Military, Psychiatry, and "Unfit" Soldiers, 1939–42,' *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 62.4 (2007): 490 [461–94].
79 Sylvia T. Warner, *T.H. White: A Biography*, (London: Cape with Chatto and Windus 1967), p. 42.
80 Leslie B. Mittleman, '*T.H. White*, by J.K. Crane,' *Books Abroad* 50.1 (1976): 168 [168].
81 White, *The Once and Future King*, p. 329.
82 Sprague, 'The Troubled Heart of T.H. White,' p. 160.
83 Warner, *T.H. White*, p. 29.

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84 Sprague, 'The Troubled Heart of T.H. White,' p. 143.
85 Sprague, 'The Troubled Heart of T.H. White,' p. 143.
86 White, *The Once and Future King*, p. 327.
87 White, *The Once and Future King*, p. 327.
88 Sprague, 'The Troubled Heart of T.H. White,' p. 162. Also see Warner, *T.H. White*, p. 305.
89 Bradley James interview with Morgan Jeffery of *Digital Spy* (3 December 2012), [http://www.digitalspy.com.au/british-tv/s53/merlin/interviews/a442466/merlin-bradley-james-qa-the-final-episodes-will-surprise-fans.html].
90 Eve K. Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 524–28.
91 See René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (Johns Hopkins Press: Baltimore, 1965).
92 See Sedgwick, *Between Men*, pp. 21–27.
93 Sprague, 'The Troubled Heart of T.H. White,' p. 143.
94 White, *The Once and Future King*, p. 342.
95 White, *The Once and Future King*, p. 340.
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